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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**April 2, 2023**

**Palm Sunday**

**Mark 11:1-9**

**Prayer:** *Father, again I thank you for who you are, I thank you for the gift that you are, the gift that this day, this time, this season represents. And I pray this morning, Lord, as we are about to delve into that, that you would again give us the presence of the gift of your Holy Spirit; guide us, direct us, and give us the ability to make this of permanent value, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as we know this is the day that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died he met with his disciples and each month we go over the description of this Passover supper as described in *Matthew 26*. It says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until*

*that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."*

So Jesus took the bread and he took the wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he directed his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat that remembrance of his sacrifice on a regular basis, this is what we refer to as "the Lord's table." And we celebrate it, we do it once a month, we do that by meditating on what the Lord Jesus did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves and that means allowing God's Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, by confessing our sins and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

And as you probably know we're following the life of Christ in the gospel of Mark; and this morning we're going to take a break from our usual journey, actually we're just going to leapfrog a little bit to Palm Sunday because this communion Sunday is Palm Sunday. And today as you've seen this morning already, it's a day that celebrates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It was a day in which the crowd took palm branches such as you see here, they placed them before Jesus as he rode on a donkey into town. And the

point of the palms that we give out is the very same point of the supper that we're remembering. I mean the bread and the cup, they serve as visible tools to help us remember the sacrifice of Jesus' body and blood, and so too the palms are the tools that we use to remember his entrance.

Let me repeat to you exactly what that was. This is from *Mark 11*. It says: *Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' Say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"*

So every year we get palm branches to represent those -- quote -- "leafy branches" that had been cut in the field and that's to help us remember. See, it turns out that we humans have a long history of using props and aids to jar our memories, because we're all in the habit of forgetting, but God knows that as well. In fact every communion Sunday, we repeat Paul's words as he described what Jesus said about the importance of remembering. He said: *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*

And so this morning I want to revisit some of the steps that we've talked about that God used in order to deal with forgetting in the nation of Israel, and I'm confident that I can repeat myself because I'm also confident that no one remembers just about everything.

Israel's forty years of wandering in the desert was coming to an end. Moses by this time had died, and his successor Joshua had the task of leading the Jews into the promised land; but in order to do that he had to cross the Jordan River which at this point was at flood stage. This was going to take a miracle, but that was by design. Joshua was to lead them in an impossible task in order for

God to lift him up because he was going to be the new Moses. And Joshua 3 says: *The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you."*

So God instructs Joshua to have the priests bring the covenant up to the banks of the Jordan so they can observe a spectacular miracle. Joshua 3 says: *"And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap."* Well, sure enough as soon as the feet of the priests touched that river, the waters stopped and then began to pile up as a heap on either side, and then the nation of Israel passed through the Jordan just like their ancestors had passed through the Red Sea on dry ground, but consider what Joshua did next.

It says: *Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. And Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask*

*in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever."*

Well Joshua has one man from each tribe go to the middle of the Jordan and there in this newly dried out ground, they were to fetch a stone in order to build a memorial. And why did Joshua command them? Because one of our greatest of human failings is forgetting. Joshua wanted to guarantee that that would never happen.

Just think about this for a second. If you had crossed the middle of a major river in the middle of its flood stage, if you saw with your own eyes a river held back in a heap on either side of it, do you think you would ever, ever forget that? Well the answer is, yes, you would. No matter how spectacular the event, eventually our memories dim, diminish and disappear. Maybe people think that's impossible, but again, consider the Israelites. For the Israelites it took only two and a half months -- not years, mind you -- months, to completely forget about the frogs and the flies and the water that turned to blood and all of the other miracles including the Passover that had gotten them out of Egypt. I mean they were witness to ten spectacular plagues that had broken out

and destroyed the will of Pharaoh and then they marched out of Egypt right through the Red Sea on dry ground only to see their enemies swallowed up by that very same Sea. And in less than three months, the God who had worked those miracles was so completely forgotten that he was then accused of taking them out into the desert to kill them. The Jews had so failed to remember what God had done that he had them spend the next forty years wandering around in circles in the desert.

Well now it's some forty years later. Joshua's going to lead the children who had been born to the very same people and he knew how easy it was to forget, and so he says these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever. And understand, a memorial is just a reminder and Joshua knew that Israel desperately needed one because over their 40-year journey in the desert they had repeatedly, pointedly, and willfully chosen to forget the God who would warn them in *Deuteronomy 6: Take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.* They had forgotten so much. They had forgotten the manna and the quail miraculously delivered, they forgot the bitter water that had turned sweet, they forgot even the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day. See, the Jews were not careful and because they were not careful, they had forgotten their God.

Now we don't often think of forgetting as something sinful, but God does. David in *Psalm 103* says: *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.* *Proverbs 3* says: *My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments.* And you know the reason why we don't see forgetting as a sin, it's not because it's something we don't do, it's because it's something that every one of us do all the time. It's so common a failing, it's so common a sin that we don't even categorize it as a sin. I mean we think of forgetfulness of being roughly akin to being left-handed or color-blind, something like that. And yet forgetfulness can range from being simply annoying to profoundly sinful. And again, it all depends on what is forgotten and who is affected by it. You know, if I forget to feed my goldfish, it's not that big a deal. If I forget to feed my newborn infant, it's a much bigger deal. Forgetting to show up for a company picnic is not nearly as big a deal as forgetting to show up for your wedding. And again, it has to do with what is forgotten and who is affected by it.

And when we forget God, we forget the biggest who and the greatest what there is. And there's a reason for why we do that and the reason why we do that so often is forgetting God seems to have no apparent consequence. If I forget my wedding, if I forget to feed my children, I'm certainly going to hear about it. If I forget to feed my fish, he's going to die and stink. If I forget God,



nothing happens. I mean the sun still rises and sets on the just and the unjust alike. Life goes on. And those who forget even the thought of God continue to do so and they do so with impunity. As the psalmist in *Psalm 73* says: *The wicked prosper.*

So you might think, well, what's the point of remembering if the consequences of forgetting are nonexistent? Well, again God knows all about that argument as well, I mean, he's heard it all before. Listen to what God says, and he says this to believers. These are believers who feel betrayed by those circumstances, by the fact that those who forget God pay no price. This is what he says in *Malachi 3*. God says: *"Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.'"*

Back then as it is today in this present life there seems to be no obvious distinction between those who serve God and those who mock him, and even God seems to acknowledge that. This is what he says. He says: *Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed*

*his name. "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. And need I add the distinction, those who remember him and those who do not. Job 8 says: While yet in flower and not cut down, they wither before any other plant. Such are the paths of all who forget God.*

So our question for this morning is have you forgotten God? And perhaps you're thinking a question like that surely needs a qualifier, I mean, what constitutes forgetting God? What level of God consciousness does he require of us? Well, again we go to Deuteronomy 6. It says: *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

So what constitutes forgetting God? Well, according to Deuteronomy

6, the answer's actually simple, it's living any part of my life as if God wasn't a part of it. I mean God says there's four parts of your day when I should be part of your thinking, when I should be on your heart, and that is when you sit down, when you walk, when you lie down, and when you rise. That's God's way of saying I should be on your mind, I should be on your heart 24-7, 365.

I mean you may think, well, isn't that a little bit overboard? Isn't that kind of fanatical? Certainly impractical? I mean wouldn't that create a whole class of people who are so heavenly minded they're no earthly good, as the cliché goes? Well, the fact is that's simply not true. I know personally for myself the most engaged people I know are people who have God on their mind constantly. In fact being heavenly minded is the key to being of any earthly good.

Listen to what C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*. He said: "If you read history you will find the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the middle ages, the English evangelicals who abolished the slave trade all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the

other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at heaven and you will get Earth 'thrown in': Aim at Earth and you will get neither."

I think the problem with the world and the church today is that we aim almost exclusively at earth. We have forgotten that we're dust and that we did not invent ourselves, that we're mere creatures put here for a purpose by a creator and that purpose is to glorify God, and that's not something that we only do on Sunday mornings.

So how much of our consciousness is God entitled to? Well the answer has to do with who we think we are and what we think we're here for. I mean if our purpose for existing is God's glory, then what part of our conscious thought can be excluded? *1 Corinthians* even says: *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* And when do we do that? Well, Deuteronomy tells us, when you sit down, when you walk, when you lie down, and when you rise; 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. That about covers it.

And now before you throw up your hands in despair, I want to revisit that scripture in Deuteronomy 6 because the very next verse says what we are to do with these commandments. It says, tie them as symbols on your hands, bind them on your foreheads, write them

on your doorframes and on your gates. And you know what all of those devices are? Those are reminders. And you know why God gives us reminders? It's because he knows how easily we forget. Why did God have an altar built out of the stones taken from the dry ground at the center of the river Jordan? As Joshua said: *"So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever."* And a memorial is something that simply stirs your memory.

See, God knows us. God knows how quickly we forget. We think back to Israel's celebrations and we think what was the purpose of the Passover celebration or what was the purpose of the day of atonement or the feast of the tabernacles? All of them were so you will not forget. Think of what Jesus said when he instituted the Lord's supper. He said, *"Do this in remembrance of me."*

And that brings me to the point of the message this morning. What we are doing today, this morning right now is remembering. That's our task. We're not just remembering a communion supper this morning, we're remembering Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. As we begin that memory process and just conjuring up those memories, let me read to you the warning that God gives us concerning communion. He says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to*

*himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*

Communion as I've said many, many times is incredibly serious business. If any of you need any of the elements, if any of you don't have what you need, just raise your hand and Steve will see to it that you have those elements.

But understand, entering into communion in an unworthy manner God says is to literally court disaster. He says if you're not absolutely confident you're a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your personal savior, or as Pete said this morning, if you need to be reconciled to your brother and sister before you bring the sacrifice of yourself to this altar, then don't participate; just pass the elements on. If you don't feel right about participating, err on the side of caution and get right with God first.

But as I say each month on the other hand you can make the mistake of thinking, okay, I'm not flawless, I'm not perfect, I still have issues to deal with, I can't participate, and that too is a mistake. See, being a child of the King doesn't mean you don't

sin, it doesn't mean that you don't fail, it means that you recognize that salvation is a gift that no one is capable of earning by being good. And we repeat this phrase by Dane Ortlund every month. I repeat it in the hopes that it gets stuck in our minds that we memorize. He says: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do."

You know, when you do fail, you understand that we have failed and we understand that we have failed because we have the Spirit of God within us. It's the Spirit of God who convicts us and we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive us, who longs to cleanse us. A father who says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

So being a child of the King doesn't mean that we're sinless, it means that when we sin we understand that we have an advocate with the Father, we have someone in heaven itself speaking out on our behalf. As *1 John* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*

That's the bottom line right there. Because we understand we have Jesus's righteousness, this alien righteousness that's not ours,

it's his but he's given it to us by faith and so we're now free to eat from his table. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that he purchased for you. You know he lived the life we were supposed to live and then died the death we all deserved to die in our place so that we could be worthy of this moment right now and sit at his table. This bread that we are about to eat is a symbol to remind us of God's willingness to take on humanity even to the point of suffering the death we all deserved to die. So take a moment to ask God to help you with the task of remembering.

*1 Corinthians 11:23 says: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*

Well today marks the beginning of the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we who forget so easily, we've been given by God a whole week to prepare to celebrate the greatest event in the history of humankind. And that is Jesus Christ's victory over death and his resurrection. Palm Sunday starts a week of remembrance of that event.



You know, there's 52 weeks in a year. This week coming up is like no other week because the events of the resurrection is like no other in all history. Human, divine and natural, supernatural, it all flows forward and backward from this one event. And so the first day of this week is today, it's Palm Sunday. And again it marks our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. And *John 12* tells us: *The multitude met Jesus with palm branches and they layed them down saying, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."* And again, we pass out these palm branches to help us remember.

And what do we remember about that day? Well, do you remember what Jesus did as he approached Jerusalem? He was again at the height of his triumph. I mean, the crowds were all shouting, the Pharisees are fuming, every single person in Jerusalem is overwhelmed with Jesus. The only one who wasn't overwhelmed was Jesus. Do you remember what he was doing? He was weeping. It said: *And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it.* And again, Jesus wasn't weeping for himself, he was weeping for a judgment that he knew would come to Jerusalem. *Luke 19* says: *And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you*

*and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."* Well some 37 years later in A.D. 70 Jerusalem was overrun by Rome and exactly what Jesus predicted came true. You see, Jesus as God incarnate, he knew the future and he also knew with absolute accuracy every last detail that would unfold over the next few days. And we know that he knew all about it because even a full month before he had arrived at this day he had spoken to the disciples in *Matthew 20*, and this is what he said. He said: *"See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."*

And so here we know at the very height of his triumph Jesus already knew what his fate was, he already knew his purpose; and that's why. He had not come to earth as a teacher or as a ruler or as an example, he had come as a sacrifice. His purpose was to lead a spotless, flawless life so that he might earn the right to have his blood drained from his body to splatter on the wood, the nails, and the soil below. And that blood, the blood of God himself, that blood alone would atone for your sin and mine. This was the moment

his whole public ministry was pointed to. It wasn't his teaching, it wasn't his living, it wasn't his miracles that brought him to Jerusalem, it was his execution. And three years earlier at the start of his public ministry, he was baptized by John the Baptist who was sent as a prophet preparing the way for Christ. John sees Jesus approaching and he identified him as the Christ not by declaring "Behold the teacher," although he was certainly the greatest teacher that ever was; John didn't declare, "Behold the leader," although he was the greatest leader this world had ever seen, and he led all creation to the greatest victory he would ever have at the cross; he didn't declare "Behold, the example", although he was the greatest example there ever was and what it meant to live a flawless human life, none of those titles defined who Jesus truly was. John the Baptist had that privilege and it was he who declared *John 1:29: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

And you think about it, what an incredibly strange but absolutely appropriate title. I mean everybody knows that the purpose of a lamb is to be sacrificed. You know for three years as Jesus taught and he healed and he ministered, he knew his primary mission was to be the sacrificial Lamb of God, and that thought, that thought was never beyond his conscience. We know from experience that we human beings have a hard time remembering. I just wonder Jesus from

experience had a hard time forgetting. I mean, how do you forget what had to loom in front of his consciousness every single waking day of his life? We know from the Palm Sunday account that Jesus wept; what we don't know because he's left no record is if he's ever laughed. You see, Jesus knew every single day of his adult life that he was here to be slaughtered as the perfect lamb. And unlike us he didn't need any reminders. So the question is could he ever forget his purpose long enough to laugh? I mean, could he ever for one moment wipe out the imminence of the torture that he knew was coming? We struggle to remember and the question is did he struggle to forget? I don't know. I do know that the palms and the crowds and the Hosannas made him weep and Palm Sunday helps me remember that. It starts off with a whole week of remembrance.

And the next day that we celebrate of holy week is holy Thursday. it's known to some as Maundy Thursday. It's named after the first word of the Latin anthem that is sung on that day. But you know, holy Thursday is a day that is set aside to commemorate the last supper, the thing that we do here every month. And the last supper was a Passover meal which in itself is a meal designed to help the Jews what? Remember. To keep them from forgetting what God had done when they were slaves in Egypt.

God told the Jews to take a lamb, slaughter it, spread its blood

over the doorposts and lintels because that night God was going to exercise the final plague in Egypt. The angel of death was going to sweep down that night and kill the firstborn of all of Egypt, but if the angel saw that blood of that slain lamb on a doorpost, he would pass over the house and it would be spared. And so to remember that event Jews slaughtered a lamb for the Passover celebration. Jesus himself celebrated the same Passover supper the night before he went to the cross and that's why we call it "the last supper." Luke tells us: *And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* Once again this is the task that God has called us to. He's asking us simply to remember.

You know the very next day Jesus was the Passover lamb whose shed blood would cover the sins of his sheep. Now it's no coincidence that Jesus was crucified at the exact same time that the Jews were celebrating Passover. John's gospel tells us that the crucifixion -- quote -- *"was the day of preparation of the Passover."* I mean on that very day the Jews, all of the Jews in Jerusalem were slaughtering their lambs to remember how the blood of a lamb had protected them from death. And at the very same moment Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God is being slaughtered so that his blood could save us from death. It wasn't a coincidence. Holy

Thursday is a day designed to help us remember that Passover.

Well the next day of holy week is Good Friday. And again, this is the day that we remember the Lord's crucifixion. And again, I've mentioned this before, I have vivid memories of this as a child. I remember this was to be a day of profound sorrow. This was the day of no shopping, no sports, no TV, no games, silence from noon to 3:00 o'clock, and we were not particularly observant Roman Catholics but I believe in some ways they got that right. And we protestants to this day, I think we miss out on a lot of that. This is the day to focus on the mocking, to focus on the slaps to the face, on the spitting, on the taunts, on the question: "*Who struck you?*" Remember the sport that the soldiers made of the King of the universe. The crown fashioned from two-inch thorn briars pressed into his skull. Again the taunts: "*Hail, king of the Jews.*" We remember the floggings, leather thongs with bits of metal and bone on their ends to tear flesh from bone. We remember the wicked procession, Jesus forced to carry his own cross, and we remember him stripped, nailed and hoisted all to the gloating and mocking of the very ones he came to save. Good Friday is a dreadful day of remembrance.

So what's good about it? Well, we focus on what took place on the cross. You know, there was no noble shouldering of man's sin

there, that wouldn't do, and this is what many, many folks misunderstand. What they don't really grasp is that Jesus didn't just pay the debt like he reached into his pocket and took out his wallet and paid. He didn't just pay the debt, the spotless one instead became sin for us. *2 Corinthians* says: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* And so what that's telling us is that flawless perfection became rape and murder and pornography and a thousand other sins personified. And you know the next time someone asks why does God allow evil in this world, I might ask them why God would be willing to become evil itself, because that's exactly what Jesus did.

God so loved this world that he sent his son who knew no sin to become sin for us. And you know it's become fashionable to see Jesus becoming sin on our behalf as just a reflection of the Father's wrath being poured out on the Son. People say it's cosmic child abuse. Here the Father has so much need of wrath that he has to pour it out on his Son as if the Son was also not part and parcel of this process but a victim of it. This was not the Father punishing his Son, this was the Father pouring out his wrath on sin itself. This was God the Father and God the Son agreeing that Father, Son and Holy Spirit's perfect justice could only be satisfied through this perfect sacrifice. Jesus was no victim. He

was a quite willing participant. Good Friday is the day that God gives us to remember his sacrifice.

The next day is Holy Saturday. And here the church is as it were at the Lord's tomb meditating on his passion and death, awaiting his resurrection with prayer and fasting because Holy Saturday commemorates the time the entire universe sat holding its breath. For Jesus's death to have been an acceptable sacrifice, it too would have had to have been just like his life, absolutely flawless. The Lord Jesus Christ's entire life and death had been marred by any sin whatsoever, then death and the grave would have claimed him and Satan would have had the ultimate victory. In fact it's been suggested that hell itself feasted and partied thinking that they had triumphed. Saturday is a day of pensive waiting anticipating Sunday.

And Sunday's the most glorious day of the entire Christian calendar. And Jesus rising from the dead proved that his sacrifice had proved flawless and therefore acceptable. Sunday is the day we celebrate the triumph of mercy and justice over sin. It's a day of worship and praise and thanksgiving like no other day all year long. It's a day when the justice of God and the mercy of God meet and kiss. Or it's a day of new outfits and chocolate bunnies and Easter eggs. I mean it all depends on what you choose to remember



and what you choose to forget.

You know, I said at the beginning of this message that we who forget so easily have been given by God a week to prepare to celebrate the greatest event in the history of humankind. So the question I want to ask all of us this morning is what are you doing to prepare for it?

You know three times a year God called ancient Israel to celebrate feasts in order to remember and when he did that he said all work is to stop. Everybody stopped what they were doing in order to appear before the Lord. And here's the most amazing thing. Even the army was to stop all of its military duties. Listen to what God said. He said this in *Exodus 34*. He said: *For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year.* Do you hear what God is saying here? This is an amazing statement. He's saying these commemorations are so incredibly important that I'm going to move in the wills of all of your enemies, Israel, and for the time necessary for you to remember me, I'm going to make them stop being your enemies. I'll make them have no desire whatsoever to even covet your land. Well, the next time you think that God would never interfere in human autonomy, just remember this promise from God: *"No one shall covet*

*your land, when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year."* So three times a year God broke through the pagan wills of Israel's enemies and made them cease coveting Israel. Three times a year God says everything's got to stop. Even the covetous desires of Israel's enemies had to stop while Israel tended to what really matters. And they were about the business of remembering, remembering God's deliverance from Egypt and his provision for Israel. Again, this was a sacred task.

Well, this week we are about the business of the deliverance of the universe from the bondage of sin. The sacred triumph of the Prince of the universe over the power of death, the resurrection that gives eternal life to all who place their faith in him. So the question I ask is what are we planning for this week? I'm sure Walmart's got a big Easter sale, I'm sure the malls are going to be packed and there's gardens to be tilled and spring cleaning to be done and time to change the oil in the car and we remember all of these tasks all too well. I'm not saying that all life is to cease this week but I am saying this is a week to change your perspective. And so I ask what do you plan on doing with it? This is the day that we celebrate the fact that the triumphal entry into Jerusalem ended with a triumphal raising of Jesus from the dead. The empty tomb is proof that Jesus won, and because he won, we win eternally. Let us never forget that. So take a moment to think

and understand *praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*

*In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* So take and drink.

Again, this is the part that we call heart, hands and feet. It's where we're actually trying to come up with some practical way to put into practice what we've been talking about.

I just want to read to you a little statement that Brett McCracken of The Gospel Coalition wrote. He said: "Next week" -- talking about this week coming up -- "Next week, over 2.3 billion people around the world -- in over 200 nations and on every continent -- will gather to sing about and worship a first-century Galilean peasant who was executed along with two thieves in Roman-occupied Jerusalem. From cathedrals in Chile to house churches in China, from Korean megachurches to tiny congregations in the Yukon, believers of every conceivable background will gather to confess a singular creed: the lowly Jesus of Nazareth was in fact God in the flesh, he defied the laws of nature and rose from the dead, and he offers eternal life to all who confess him as their Lord and Savior. In a season of chocolate eggs and gelatinous yellow

bunnies, we can easily miss the mind-blowing wonder -- and cosmic consequences -- of what transpired that week, two millennia ago."

I pointed out that in ancient Israel the responsibility for households not to miss this rested with the men. And so this morning I want to address specifically the husbands and ask is this week going to be any different than any of the other weeks in your household?

Growing up, when we were growing up I used the passion week to view Franco Zeffirelli's film *Jesus of Nazareth*. I still think it's one of the greatest Easter films of all time. It was a six-hour movie so we watched a bit of it every day to kind of prep us for the week.

I note the first season of *The Chosen* is now available on Netflix. You might want to participate in that. I'm sure most of us are going to be here for the Good Friday service. I'm just asking the question what about the rest of the week? Perhaps you might want to use devotionals or Christian music or read from the scripture.

Again, practically speaking, I came across -- the Gospel Coalition has a 75-song play list available on Spotify, Apple Music or Amazon Music, and they say this: "This new playlist follows the ups and

downs of Holy Week's many significant moments—from the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday to the Upper Room and Gethsemane on Maundy Thursday, Golgotha on Good Friday, the grief and tension of Silent Saturday, and the gloriously empty tomb of Easter Sunday." That sounds well worth checking out. Just Google "Gospel Coalition," you'll find it.

I just want to exhort all of us this morning, make this week different from every other week. Ask God for wisdom. Ask him to help you remember. Let's pray.

*Father, I just thank you that this week represents the triumph of good over evil, the absolute history making event that turns history from literally all the time before that to all the time after that. And we just praise you and thank you, Lord, that you are the center of history, the center of everything good. I pray that you would give us this week to reflect and to think about what you've done for us and the victory you've won for us. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*